



CONNECTICUT STATE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL
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RE: Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the State Department of Aging and Disability Services HB 5037: AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

To The Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Molly Cole, and I am the Executive Director of the CT State Independent Living Council, (SILC) located in Hartford, CT. I am here to testify regarding the budget for the Department of Aging and Disability Services. In general, this proposed budget looks good. However, the allocation for the five Independent Living Centers (ILC's) is level funded. This is a serious issue for the people with disabilities in Connecticut who benefit or could benefit from the services of the Centers. **We are requesting a \$1,000,000 increase in the allocation for the centers from \$766,760 to \$1,766,760.**

SILC works across CT to promote choice, equal access, opportunity, and full inclusion of people with disabilities into the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society. To achieve this goal, we work with the five Independent Living Centers which are located throughout the state. Think of SILC as the planning body and the ILCs are where the plans are put into action. We know that life can be challenging for individuals with disabilities. But we also believe -- as do you -- that our abilities exceed any disability we may have.

The five Centers were established in 1987 to help people of all ages, with all types of disabilities, to live independently in the community. They were originally established to help people with disabilities who would otherwise have been forced to live in state facilities. The Centers are non-residential organizations with staff made up of at least 51 percent people with disabilities. The Centers empower thousands of individuals every year with information, counseling, and support services.

The Centers provide many services and supports to people with disabilities:

- Develop lifelong independent living skills.
- Find and maintain housing in their communities.
- Transition out of nursing facilities through Money Follows the Person (MFP) and other programs.
- Gain access to services that prevent the need for placement in a nursing facility.

- Connect to appropriate technology to support independent living.
- Access benefits counseling.
- Develop the skills to advocate for themselves and others.
- Transition from school to work.
- Vocational services – help people learn soft skills and find jobs.
- Deaf services – dedicated staff in each center, fluent in ASL, to make all services available to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

In FY21 the Centers provided highly effective services to thousands of people. But we can do more for the state's citizens with disabilities.

- **7,405** – Individuals received information and referral services on disability related topics.
- **113** – Transitioned out of nursing facilities through MFP, saving the state millions, while improving the quality of life for those individuals.
- **805**– Received independent living skills training, peer counseling, advocacy, youth & educational services.
- **433** – Received services that prevented need for costly emergency health, transportation, and residential support.
- **237**– Helped to get and keep affordable, accessible housing.
- **102** –Received support services to get and keep jobs.
- **275** – Individuals able to stay in their homes through funding for structural modifications, security deposits, first month rent, personal assistance & transportation.

In 2016 the SILC developed a report based on a U.S. Census driven funding formula developed by the Indiana Business Research Center. That report concluded that \$5.5 million is the true cost to fully fund the CT ILC's, permitting them to meet the needs in the state with a base funding level of \$550,000 per center.

When they were established, the Centers were funded with matching state and federal dollars at \$200,000 each. But in 35 years of operation, while the cost of living has increased more than 200 percent, the Federal funding for the Centers has only increased to \$195,000 per center. And in that same time, State funding has DECREASED to \$92,000. In very difficult times, the Center budgets have been repeatedly cut. The current allocation in the budget is \$766,760 FOR ALL FIVE CENTERS . That comes to \$153,352 per center. HOWEVER, approximately \$60,000 per center is earmarked for Deaf Services only, leaving each center with about \$92,000 to conduct all other services to people with disabilities in their region.

In order to operate with such limited funding, the Centers have reduced staff and limited services. They have drastically reduced their service areas. In the years after they were established, the five centers were able to serve all 169 towns in the state. But today they can directly serve only 27.

And while all these cuts are happening, the need for services and supports for people with disabilities has increased. According to the CDC there are 614,000 people identified as living with a disability in the state of Connecticut, or roughly one in five residents. Since the start of the pandemic in 2020 the need for services and requests for assistance are up 51 percent, with waiting lists in the centers as long as six months.

The SILCs and CILs are located in every state. In our neighboring state of New York, with over 30 Centers, the state funding per center is \$335,000. And in Massachusetts, with ten centers, the state funding is \$645,000 per center. Yet Connecticut continues to struggle to reach a functional level of state support for these vital services.

Today, Connecticut's fiscal health is the strongest it has been in a generation. It is time to build back the Centers for Independent Living to a reasonable budget allocation. We are therefore requesting an increase of \$1,000,000, putting the total allocation at \$1,766,760. That would fund each Center at \$353,352.

Thank you for your attention, and for your commitment to supporting all Connecticut citizens to lead good lives in their communities.

Location of the Independent Living Centers

- **Independence Northwest, Naugatuck**
- **Access Independence, Stratford**
- **Independence Unlimited, Hartford**
- **Center for Disability Rights, West Haven**
- **Disabilities Network of Eastern CT, Norwich**